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THE RAILROADING OF OTEPKA

Like a bad dream for the State Department, the Otepka case keeps bobbing to the surface, giving the public occasional glimpses of a sordid story in Washington politics. Latest ripple in this strange episode is the news report that Walt Rostow, special assistant to President Johnson, was rejected three times for security clearance during President Eisenhower's administration. Rostow, it will be remembered, was brought into the administration by the late John F. Kennedy.

A brief filed in a Civil Service case at the State Department makes the charges. It was filed with a department hearings officer on behalf of Otto F. Otepka, who is fighting dismissal as the State Department's chief security evaluations officer.

Otepka was railroaded for charging lax security procedures in the State Department, which claims it shunted Otepka aside because he gave secret documents to the Senate Internal Security subcommittee. Actually, Otepka's troubles began when he was called into a meeting in 1960 with Dean Rusk and Bobby Kennedy. They wanted Otepka to give Rostow emergency clearance for a State Department post, without a routine field investigation. Otepka refused.

He told Rusk and Bobby Kennedy that he knew of information in Central Intelligence Agency and Air Force files that made him feel a field investigation was advisable. Otepka's troubles began then.

He has been fighting dismissal ever since through a series of hearings. If Rusk upholds his dismissal Otepka plans to take the case to court where it may get a public airing, something Otepka has insisted on all along.

The brief filed by Otepka outlines at least 18 cases of alleged security laxity in the State Department, including sexual misconduct by diplomatic personnel. What makes it difficult to dig beneath the State Department smoke screen is the move several years ago ordering field agents to de-

stroy the bulk of their files on government security risks.

The Senate Internal Security subcommittee turned up a number of security lapses, corroborating much of the testimony of Otepka who was removed from his security post for telling the committee what he knew. Of a list of 800 possible department security risks, Otepka said he had granted clearances to a majority, but that he also recommended a large number for dismissal as security risks. But final decision to clear the employees in such cases was made by higher authorities.

Otepka told the Senate Internal Security subcommittee that of 168 State Department employees appointed since Dean Rusk became Secretary of State, 150 were not given security checks required by law. Instead of complying with the law, Rusk hired the 150 by issuing "waivers" to ignore the law.

Otepka has done nothing illegal or unethical, but State Department officers in order to "make a case" that would give Rusk grounds for firing Otepka, used tactics which would send a police officer to jail for entrapment and invasion of privacy. On July 9, 1963, John F. Reilly (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Security) and Elmer Dewey Hill (one of Reilly's division chiefs) lied under oath when questioned by the Senate Internal Security subcommittee about their handling of the "Otepka investigation".

On Nov. 8, 1963, the subcommittee revealed that Reilly and Hill, subpoenaed for additional testimony, admitted (again under oath) the falsity of testimony which they had given on July 9.

State Department security files are so negligently handled that a trunk full of security information was sold at a public auction by mistake. Two of Otepka's assistants who tried to help him were ordered into virtual exile for their efforts. When they declined their transfers, and asked for a hearing, they were fired. Such is the smokescreen at Foggy Bottom.

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